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Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 2237, The 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution
Commemoration Act

September 14, 2004

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to come before you today in support of H.R. 2237, the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act. As the Military Historian of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and the Executive Director of the Hudson River Valley Institute, I have dedicated the last five years after my retirement from the United States Army to increasing public awareness of the American Revolution. As a doctoral student at Duke University, I studied the American Revolution and wrote my dissertation about its onset in Georgia. As a faculty member and head of the military history program at the United States Military Academy at West Point for fifteen years and now for the last four years as a professor at Marist College, I have emphasized the crucial significance of the War for American Independence to our heritage and the United States of today. As a re-enactor in the 5th New York Regiment, I live the Revolution day in and day out in battles and in public presentations. As I was retiring from a thirty-year career in the Army in 1999, I was inspired by the idea of a 225th anniversary commemoration of the American Revolution as a way to educate New Yorkers and heritage tourists from beyond the state about the critical role that the Hudson River Valley played in our struggle for independence. Once I found out that the National Park Service (NPS) had the same idea, I took part in a planning session and its Revolutionary War Parks and Partners Workshop. I also attended the NPS's first public symposium, "The Changing Meaning of Freedom," in Boston, Massachusetts, in June 2000 designed to draw attention to the place where the

first acts of the American Revolution played out. I have been a part of almost all of the major programs of the 225th Anniversary.

On April 19, 2000, on the green at Lexington, Massachusetts, the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution began, a celebration that will last until November 2008. Unlike the Bicentennial of the nation's formative event, this initiative owes its success to patriotic and service organizations and re-enactors without the official national seal of approval and funding from the United States Congress. The NPS has done its best to take the lead in this celebration, but it has had little funding dedicated to the project, and there is no coherent, central program dedicated to the American Revolution: the story is still told park by park, in a fragmented way. Most of the work was done up front with fewer and fewer resources devoted to the project each year. While what NPS has done is laudable as it set the foundation for the 225th anniversary, it needs the help of Congress to bring the commemoration to a fitting conclusion and to assure that there are enduring legacies that will bridge the gap until the 250th anniversary in 2025.

Congress now has the opportunity to provide such assistance by passing H. R. 2237, the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act. While local celebrations have marked the key events that took place from Lexington to Long Island to Saratoga to Monmouth to Rhode Island to Savannah to Stony Point from 1775 to 1779, the only official, national event was NPS's Liberty on the Mall encampment on June 30-July 1, 2001. There are many significant events left to remember as the War for Independence expanded into the South and the armies returned to the Hudson River Valley to await the outcome of the peace process. Each generation has the responsibility to educate its members and the generations that follow about the enduring values that make us distinctively Americans. We must continue to "Light Freedom's Flame"—the NPS's motto for the 225th—so that our children and our children's children will carry on the legacy of liberty and opportunity for all. In a time when the United States is waging a war on terrorism, and our troops are in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, we have the additional responsibility to pause to remember the sacrifices that our forebears made to give us the freedom and riches that we enjoy as a nation today even as we set the example for those we are trying to set on a democratic course. By remembering our past struggles, we add special meaning and perspective to our present efforts.

Recognizing that leaders must seize opportunities for national reflection when they arise, twenty House members from both sides of the aisle have co-sponsored the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act to join the legislation already passed in the Senate so that present generations of Americans will not forget their past. This act will provide national recognition for our common effort to remember the formative experiences of the War for Independence and funding to help flesh out educational and preservation programs to pass on the memory to the next generation. The American Revolution, inspired by the spirit of liberty and independence among the inhabitants of the original thirteen English colonies, was an event of global significance, having a profound and lasting effect on the government, laws, culture, society, and values of the United States. The citizens of the United States need an educational program to understand and to appreciate the continuing legacy of the American Revolution. The

225th anniversary of the American Revolution provides an opportunity to enhance public awareness and understanding of the effect of that war on the lives of citizens of the United States and those around the world who yearn for the opportunities that many of us take for granted. At the conclusion of the 225th activities, we expect the multiple meanings of the American Revolution to be lodged securely in the public's imagination and the historic resources from the period to be protected better than ever before.

The NPS administers battlefields, historical parks, and programs related to America's history and natural resources, not just the Revolutionary War. Since there is no national focus for this aspect of its charter, and there are always too few resources, the NPS faces many challenges administering its sites and programs:

- Revolutionary War parks and adjacent lands and resources are being increasingly threatened by development;
- These parks face a lack of operating funds and, in many cases, outdated infrastructures;
- Current scholarship is not being reflected in NPS interpretation of the Revolution;
- Educational programs are outdated and do not use current methods and technologies to reach young audiences.

The NPS's own white paper, "An Action Plan for the National Park Service for the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution," produced in 2001, provides the blueprint for what can be done with the proper funding. Its website, "American Revolution: Lighting Freedom's Flame," serves not as a finished product but rather as a modest start point for education on the world-wide web to gain the attention of students of all ages. The National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the planned Education Center at Mount Vernon, Virginia, are providing models for the interpretive programs that can be done at each of the major, national historic sites. The list of accomplishments of the NPS's 225th Anniversary initiative listed on the website is on the one hand impressive considering that the small amount of funding allocated to the project has been scraped together by a dedicated corps in the NPS committed to remembering our Revolutionary heritage. The list of accomplishments is on the other hand limited based on the promise of programs laid out in the Action Plan. Many key programs still await funding.

While there has been progress in some of these areas, Congress has not provided enough funding to preserve and to interpret our Revolutionary heritage. Once the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act becomes law and annual funding follows, Congress will have established a program that will allow the NPS to re-enforce the "Teaching American History" grant program of the Department of Education. These initiatives will give teachers additional tools and enhanced historical parks to assist our children in learning about, and renewing our faith in, the ideals that have made the United States of America great.

The 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act before you addresses the critical educational, interpretive, and preservation issues, directing the Secretary of the Interior to:

- Produce and distribute to the public educational materials relating to the American Revolution, such as handbooks, maps, and interpretive guides;
- Provide technical assistance to other Federal agencies, States, local governments, private entities and partner with the governments of the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Canada;
- Assist in the protection of resources associated with the American Revolution [by helping the American Battlefield Protection Program prioritize those sites most threatened];
- Enhance communications, connections, and collaboration among the National Park Service units and programs relating to the American Revolution; and,
- Expand the research base for interpretation of and education on the American Revolution.

A newly invigorated national program led by the NPS that links historic structures and sites, routes, activities, community projects, exhibits, and multimedia materials in a manner that is unified and flexible is the best method of conveying to citizens of the United States the story and significance of the American Revolution. With enhanced Congressional support and guidance and the leadership of NPS, willing partners can then bring the events and people of the American Revolution to life. Students of all ages can follow in the footsteps of General George Washington, other founding fathers and mothers, and common soldiers and citizens who made tough choices as they risked their fortunes and very lives for what they held dear. We should take advantage of the opportunities that our heritage and the 225th Anniversary afford us to preserve and to interpret the story and physical sites in our trust. Significant sites have already disappeared, and others are losing the fight to developers. Paoli Battlefield in Pennsylvania shows what can be done with local support and Congressional muscle as it was saved from development at the eleventh hour. Increased education will lead to public awareness that will reinforce efforts to preserve historic sites from development and to improve infrastructure and interpretive programs even more.

The ad hoc and largely localized celebration of the 225th Anniversary of the War for Independence has inspired citizens to learn more about the early history of their country. Thousands of re-enactors and tens of thousands of spectators have attended major battle re-enactments at Brooklyn, White Plains, and Fort Edwards (Saratoga) in New York, Brandywine in Pennsylvania, and Newport in Rhode Island. The re-enactments of the sieges of Savannah in October 2004 and Yorktown in Virginia in October 2006 will draw huge galleries. Governor George E. Pataki of New York used the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution River as the inspiration to develop an American Revolutionary Heritage Trail and to open Fort Montgomery on the Hudson River as the newest state historic site. Congress itself took a step in 2000 toward a Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail to lead heritage tourists from Rhode Island to Virginia to the battlefield of Yorktown to remember the great victory there in October 2006. Additional funding to the NPS will leverage many

similar projects that will sustain the flame of the Revolution until the 250th anniversary in 2025.

General George Washington himself remembered with wonder as a “standing miracle” what the Continental Army had accomplished in eight long years of war as he issued his farewell orders to the Continental Army on November 2, 1783 in New York. We should remember the magnificence of that “standing miracle” today and pass that remembrance into the future. Many of us memorized the lines of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Concord Hymn” as that great poet reflected on the memory of sacrifice and made his bid to insure that that sacrifice was never forgotten:

“By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April’s breeze unfurled;
Here once the embattled farmers stood;
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps,
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream that seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We place with joy a votive stone,
That memory may their deeds redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

O Thou who made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free, --
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raised to them and Thee.”

We have the opportunity to preserve that figurative “votive stone” and keep the memory alive. The 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act provides the means to fulfill our responsibilities as citizens to preserve the past so that we may better understand the challenges of the present and future. I strongly urge you to support passage of the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution Commemoration Act. Thank you.